

to Black women's studies, especially the fact that the two movements are still new and have evolved nearly simultaneously, much of the current teaching, research, and writing about Black women is not feminist, is not radical, and unfortunately is not always even analytical. Naming and describing our experience are important initial steps, but not alone sufficient to get us where we need to go. A descriptive approach to the lives of Black women, a "great Black women" in history or literature approach, or any traditional male-identified approach will not result in intellectually groundbreaking or politically transforming work. We cannot change our lives by teaching solely about "exceptions" to the ravages of white-male oppression. Only through exploring the experience of supposedly "ordinary" Black women whose "unexceptional" actions enabled us and the race to survive, will we be able to begin to develop an overview and an analytical framework for understanding the lives of Afro-American women. [1982]

## NOTES

1. William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Modern Library, 1932), 53.
2. Laura S. Haviland, *A Woman's Life-Work, Labors and Experience* (Chicago: Publishing Association of Friends, 1889; copyright 1881), 300–301; reprinted in Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 32–33.
3. Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," *Ms. (Magazine)* 1974), 64–70, 105.
4. Bernette Golden, Personal letter, April 1, 1974.



## Men and Women's Studies: Premises, Perils, and Promise

MICHAEL KIMMEL

What does women's studies have to do with men? For one thing, it clears an intellectual space for talking about gender. I am not suggesting that among all the other things women's studies has to do, it must now also drop everything and take care of men in

some vaguely academic version of the second shift. (I have heard arguments from men suggesting that women's studies must provide us with "a room of our own" within the curriculum, to appropriate the words of Virginia Woolf—and make sure that room has a rather commanding view of the traditional campus!)

When I say women's studies is about men, I mean that *women's studies has made men visible*. Before women's studies, men were invisible—especially to themselves. By making women visible, women's studies also made men visible both to women and to men themselves. If men are now taking up the issue of gender, it is probably less accurate to say, "Thank goodness they've arrived," the way one might when the cavalry appears in a western film, than to say, "It's about time."

Of course, making men visible has not been the primary task of women's studies. But it has been one of its signal successes. The major achievement of women's studies, acting independently and as a force within traditional disciplines, has been making *women* visible through the rediscovery of long-neglected, undervalued, and understudied women who were accomplished leaders, artists, composers, and writers and placing them in the pantheons of significance where they rightly belong. In addition, women's studies has rediscovered the voices of ordinary women—the laundresses and the salesgirls, the union maids and the union organizers, the workers and the wives—who have struggled to scratch out lives of meaning and dignity. For this—whether they know it or not, whether they acknowledge it or not—women all over the world owe a debt.

But in making women visible, women's studies has been at the epicenter of a seismic shift in the university as we know it. Women's studies has made *gender* visible. Women's studies has demonstrated that gender is one of the axes around which social life is organized, one of the most crucial building blocks of our identities. Before women's studies, we didn't know that gender mattered. Twenty-five years ago, there were no women's studies courses in colleges or universities, no women's studies lists at university presses across the country. In my field of sociology, there were no gender courses,

no specialty area called the Sociology of Gender. We had, instead, a field called Marriage and the Family—to my mind the Ladies' Auxiliary of Sociology. By making women visible, women's studies decentered men as the unexamined, disembodied authorial voice of the academic canon and showed that men, as well as women, are utterly embodied, their identities are as socially constructed as those of women. When the voice of the canon speaks, we can no longer *assume* that voice is going to sound masculine or that the speaker is going to look like a man.

The problem is that many men do not yet know this. Though ubiquitous in positions of power, many men remain invisible to themselves as gendered beings. Courses on gender in the universities are populated largely by women, as if the term applied only to them. "Woman alone seems to have 'gender' since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between the sexes in which the standard has always been man," writes historian Thomas Lacquer.<sup>1</sup> Or, as the Chinese proverb has it, the fish are the last to discover the ocean.

I know this from my own experience: women's studies made gender visible to me. In the early 1980s I participated in a graduate-level women's studies seminar in which I was the only man among about a dozen participants. During one meeting, a white woman and a black woman were discussing whether all women were, by definition, "sisters" because they all had essentially the same experiences and because all women faced a common oppression by all men. The white women asserted that the fact that they were both women bonded them, in spite of racial differences. The black woman disagreed.

"When you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, what do you see?" she asked.

"I see a woman," replied the white woman.

"That's precisely the problem," responded the black woman. "I see a *black* woman. To me, race is visible every day, because race is how I am *not* privileged in our culture. Race is invisible to you, because it's how you are privileged. It's why there will always be differences in our experience."

As I witnessed this exchange, I was startled, and groaned—more audibly, perhaps, than I had

intended. Someone asked what my response meant. "Well," I said, "when I look in the mirror, I see a human being. I'm universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm the generic person!"

Sometimes, I like to think it was on that day that I *became* a middle-class white man. Sure, I had been all those before, but they had not meant much to me. Since then, I have begun to understand that race, class, and gender do not refer only to other people, who are marginalized by race, class, or gender privilege. Those terms also describe me. I enjoy the privilege of invisibility. The very processes that confer privilege to one group and not another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred. American men have come to think of ourselves as genderless, in part because gender privilege affords us the luxury of ignoring the centrality of gender. But women's studies offers the possibility of making gender visible to men as well and, in so doing, creating the possibilities of alliances between women and men to collaboratively investigate what gender means, how it works, and what its consequences are.

In *Fire with Fire*, Naomi Wolf returns often to her book's epigraph, that famous line of Audre Lorde, "the Master's tools cannot dismantle the Master's house." Wolf believes that her book is a refutation of that position, and when one considers the impact of women's studies on the university and the culture at large, it seems that on this score at least, Wolf is quite right—that passionate, disciplined scholarship, inspired and dedicated teaching, and committed, engaged inquiry can contribute to the reorientation of the university as an institution. All over the country, schools are integrating "gender awareness" into their first-year curricula, even orienting the entire curriculum around gender awareness. Within the professional organization of my discipline, sociology, the Sex and Gender section is now the largest section of the entire profession. Gender has moved from the margins—Marriage and the Family—to the center and is the largest single constituency within the field.

Most commentators laud the accomplishments of women's studies programs in transforming women's lives, but it is obvious that women's studies

programs have also been transformative for men. The Duke case is a particularly successful one: the popular house course "Men and Gender Issues" has been offered under the umbrella of Women's Studies for five years. Men Acting for Change (MAC), the campus group for pro-feminist men that has become a model for similar groups on campuses around the country, found a supportive harbor in the Women's Studies Program. The first time I came to lecture at Duke three years ago, my lecture was jointly sponsored by the Women's Studies Program and the Inter-Fraternity Council—the first time, I'm told, that those two organizations had cooperated on anything. Women's studies can—and does—forge creative alliances!

Essentially, however, the program at Duke and women's studies in general has centered around the same two projects as any other discipline: teaching and research. And to speak personally, the perspectives of women's studies have transformed both my research and my teaching. Women's studies made it *possible* for me to do the work I do. And for that I am grateful. Inspired by the way women's studies made gender visible, I offered a course called "Sociology of the Male Experience" in 1983 at Rutgers University, where I was then a young assistant professor. This was the first such course on men and masculinity in the state of New Jersey, and I received enormous support both from my own department and from the Women's Studies Program at Rutgers, then chaired by Catharine Stimpson. Today, I teach that course as well as a course entitled "Sex and Society" at Stony Brook to over 350 students each semester. Now, as then, the course is cross-listed with women's studies. But I also teach our department's classical sociological theory course, the course on the historical development of social and political theory. In that course, students traditionally read works by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Smith, Marx, Durkheim, Tocqueville, Weber, and Freud. This is probably the most intractably canonical "Dead White European Men" course we offer in the social sciences. But it has become impossible for me to teach the works of those "great men" without reference to gender—without noting, for example, the gendered creation myths that characterize the move from the

state of nature to civil society in the thought of Locke or Hobbes, or the chronic anxiety and loss of control attendant upon modern society documented by Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, or Freud. Moreover, I find that I cannot teach about the rise of nineteenth-century liberal individualism without including Frederick Douglass or Mary Wollstonecraft; nor can I teach about the late nineteenth-century critiques of individualism without references to W. E. B. Du Bois or to Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

If women's studies has made gender, and hence *men*, visible, then it has also raised a question about men: where are they? where have they been in women's struggles for equality? Taking my cues from women's history, I began to research men's responses to feminism. *Against the Tide* tries to provide part of the answer, a missing chapter from women's history: the chapter about the men who supported women's equality.<sup>2</sup> When I began *Against the Tide*, I mentioned to Catharine Stimpson, then dean of the Graduate School at Rutgers, what I intended to do. "A book about men who supported feminism?" she asked. "Now that will surely be the world's shortest book!" she joked. Of course, she knew better, but I did not really know what I would find. It turns out that in every arena in which women have struggled for equal rights—education (the right to go to college or professional school, the right to go to college with men), economic life (the right to work, join unions, receive equal wages), social life (the right to own property, have access to birth control, get a divorce), or political life (the right to vote, to hold elective office, to serve on juries)—there have been American men, some prominent, many unheralded, who have supported them: men such as Thomas Paine, who sat before the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and recognized that women would not be included under its provisions, although women had, as he put it, an "equal right to virtue." Men such as famed abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, who campaigned tirelessly for women's rights from Seneca Falls onward. Men such as Matthew Vassar, William Alan Neilson, and Henry Durant, founders of Vassar, Smith, and Wellesley colleges. It was Durant, founder of

Wellesley, who in 1877 called the higher education of women a “revolt”: “We revolt against the slavery in which women are held by the customs of society—the broken health, the aimless lives, the subordinate position, the helpless dependence, the dishonesties and shams of so-called education. The Higher Education of Women is one of the great world battle cries for freedom; for right against might. It is the cry of the oppressed slave. It is the assertion of absolute equality.”<sup>3</sup>

Pro-feminist men have included educators such as John Dewey, who urged that women be admitted to the University of Chicago and was one of the founders of the Men's League for Woman Suffrage, the nation's first pro-feminist men's organization. The group of pro-feminist men included W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Eugene Debs among the most vigorous supporters of woman suffrage. And there have been academic men such as Lester Ward and George Herbert Mead, to name but two, who pointed toward the scholarly study of women and opposed gender inequality. In one of his major treatises, *Applied Sociology*, Ward provided an epigraph for the advent of women's studies, arguing that “the universal prevalence of the androcentric world-view acts as a wet blanket on all the genial fire of the female sex.”<sup>4</sup> Pro-feminist men are also policymakers such as Robert Reich, secretary of labor in the Clinton administration, who wrote a furious letter (reprinted in *Ms. magazine*) to a college president when his wife was denied tenure, and Representative Don Edwards of California, who has introduced the ERA in every session of Congress since 1974, as well as former Supreme Court justice Harry Blackmun, that vigilant defender of women's right to control their own bodies.

Supporters of women's equality have also included the less-celebrated men who simply lived out their principles of equality without fanfare. Men such as James Mott (married to Lucretia), Theodore Weld (married to Angelina Grimké), and Wendell Phillips, ardent abolitionist and suffrage supporter. In 1856, Lucy Stone called her husband, Henry Brown Blackwell, “the best husband in the world. In the midst of all the extra care,

hurry and perplexity of business, you stop and look after all my little affairs,” she wrote, “doing everything you can to save me trouble.”<sup>5</sup> More than a half a century later, Margaret Sanger quotes her husband, William, as telling her to “go ahead and finish your writing, and I'll get dinner and wash the dishes.”<sup>6</sup> (She also comments that she drew the curtains in the kitchen of their first-floor Greenwich Village apartment, lest passersby see her husband wearing an apron.) It appears that long before Ted Kramer and Mr. Mom, real men did housework!

Men *have* been there supporting women's equality every step of the way. And if men have been there, it means that men *can* be there and that they *will* be there. This legacy of men who supported women's equality allows contemporary men to join what I like to think of as the Gentlemen's Auxiliary of the Women's Movement. Neither passive bystanders nor the front-line forces—and especially not the leaders of those troops—men still have a pivotal role to play. Men can join this epochal struggle and provide support both individually and collectively. This strikes me as an utterly honorable relationship to feminism, quite different from an impulse I've encountered among newly enlightened men that goes something like, “Thanks for bringing all this to my attention, ladies. We'll take it from here.” It also serves as an important corrective to many men's fears, which often boil down to “How can I support feminism without feeling like—or being seen as—a wimp?” To be a member of the Auxiliary is to know that the central actors in the struggle for gender equality will be, as they always have been, women.

But women's studies has done more than make the study of gender possible; it has made it *necessary*. The issues raised by women in the university and outside it have not “gone away” or subsided now that women have been offered a few resources and an academic room of their own. Women's studies has not been content with one room while the rest of the university goes about its androcentric business, any more than the women's movement has been convinced of its political victory because 100 percent of the U.S. senators from California in 1993 are women. Think about the shockwaves



that rippled outward from Clarence Thomas's confirmation hearings over two years ago. Remember how the media responded to that event; recall the shameful way Anita Hill was treated by the Senate Judiciary Committee. The phrase the media used, as if with one voice, was that Thomas's confirmation would have a "chilling effect" on American women—that women would be less likely to come forward to describe their experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace, that women would be less likely to speak of the inequities and humiliations that permeated their working lives. Have the media ever been more wrong? Not only was there no "chilling effect," there was a national thaw. Women have been coming forward in unprecedented numbers to talk about their working lives. And they have not gone away. On campuses and off all across the country, women's studies students and faculty have joined in this virtual national seminar about men, masculinity, and power.

Gender as a power relation is the "it" that men "just don't get" in the current discussion. Women's studies scholars have demonstrated that masculinity and femininity are identities that are socially constructed in a field of power. Gender, like race and class, is not simply a mode of classification by which biological creatures are sorted into their respective and appropriate niches. Gender is about power. Just because both masculinity and femininity are socially constructed does not mean that they are equivalent, that there are no dynamics of power and privilege in operation. The problem with bringing men into this discussion about gender and power is that these issues are invisible to men. [1996]

#### NOTES

1. Thomas Lacquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 22.
2. Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas Mosmiller, eds., *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990. A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).
3. Thomas Paine, "An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex," 1775, and Henry Fowle Durant, "The Spirit of the College," 1877, in *Against the Tide*, ed. Kimmel and Mosmiller, 63–66, 132.
4. Lester Frank Ward, *Applied Sociology: A Treatise on the Conscious Improvement of Society by Society* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 232.



## Women's Studies and Transnational Feminism

HEATHER HEWETT

More often than not, the story we tell about the discipline of women's studies is a story that starts with the first wave of feminist organizing in the United States and England during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But what kinds of stories might we tell about feminism and women's studies if we were to examine the diverse range of women's movements in *all* countries and cultures? A global perspective on feminism reveals how ideas about women's rights and feminism have originated and developed in many different places, and how these ideas have traveled between individuals living in very different circumstances. This perspective removes the United States from the center of feminism and asks us to place the U.S. women's movement in a broader context. As Aili Mari Tripp observes, "Regardless of the common perception in the West that ideas regarding the emancipation of women have spread from the West outward into other parts of the world . . . in fact, the influences have always been multidirectional" (Tripp, 51). This global viewpoint, which many feminist scholars identify as *transnational*, is challenging the field of women's studies to rethink basic concepts and reorient feminist activism in ways that respond to a rapidly changing world.

### THE WORDS WE USE AND THE IMAGES THEY CREATE

In the social sciences, many researchers argue that the term *transnational* provides the most accurate description for our globalized, and rapidly globalizing, world—more accurate, they argue, than the more familiar term, *international*. They argue that the world of the early twenty-first century has changed dramatically: as a result of new information and computer technologies, increased travel, and the growth of the global economy, we are more